

Edelman, Charles, *Shakespeare's Military Language: A Dictionary* (Athlone Shakespeare Dictionary Series), London and New Brunswick, The Athlone Press, 2000; cloth; pp. ix, 423; R.R.P. £125.00; ISBN 0485115468.

Edelman is an eminently qualified authority to offer us this dictionary, as he is the author of the favourably received and learned *Brawl Ridiculous: Sword-fighting in Shakespeare's Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) and related publications. As Amazon.co.uk puts the matter on its website: 'More than just a book of definitions, this dictionary provides a comprehensive account of Shakespeare's portrayal of military life, tactics and technology'. The book can, in fact, quite profitably be read straight through, literally from A—Y, and it is invariably interesting and informative; I feel I have learned a great deal from perusing it thoroughly, and I will continue to learn from it in years to come.

Among the many instructive and persuasive entries I would mention as examples are *bumbast* (or *bombast*), *lieutenant*, *false fire*, *law of arms*, and *surgeon*. It is useful to know that Elizabethan military experts objected to 'soldiers wearing "bumbastic", i.e. 'padded hose', and this may indeed, as Edelman suggests, provide special point to Hal's comments on Falstaff as a 'creature of bumbast' (*1 Henry 4*, 2.4.327, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, from which Edelman quotes). Edelman's observation that *law of arms* in *King Lear*, 5.3.153, as offered in the Quarto, is technically more correct than the Folio's *law of war* not only exhibits important military knowledge, but also, and no less significantly, contributes to our understanding of the relationship between Q and F as texts.

In the case of *false fire* (i.e. 'a blank charge'), it was particularly revealing to learn that inexperienced recruits would regularly 'flinch, or close their eyes, when firing their calivers'. Edelman believes that Hamlet has seen the King 'blench' (i.e. flinch) when he says, about Claudius's reaction to the 'Mousetrap', 'What, frighted with false fire?' (3.2.266). This raises an interesting possibility about how readers/directors are to imagine Claudius's reaction (in the absence of a clear stage direction), but Edelman's confidence worries me a little, as the closest thing to a stage direction that we do have is Ophelia's statement in the preceding line, 'The King rises', and the word 'blench' which Edelman quotes does not appear in the immediate context but as far back as 2.2.597, where Hamlet speculates about what Claudius's reaction *might* be (If 'a do blench ...') well before 'The Mousetrap' is actually performed. Surely it is possible that Claudius has enough self-control merely to rise, or, at least, that he does not close his eyes?

But at least Edelman's interpretation has the merit of making us think,

and that is also true in another instance which will not inspire universal consent, namely where he discusses the word *petar* (or *petard*) in Hamlet's 'tis sport to have the engineer / Hoist with his own petar, an't shall go hard / But I will delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon ... ' (3.4.206-9). Edelman surmises that we are to think of two, separate explosions here: Claudius (the 'engineer') will be the victim of the first, but *their*, he claims unhesitatingly, refers to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who will be 'dispatched when a much larger charge is placed beneath them by Hamlet himself'. One reason for Edelman's belief in two explosions is that 'Petards ... would be useless as a mined or counter-mined explosive'. I think, however, that Hamlet has in mind a situation where *so to speak* Claudius is blown up by his own device, in that Hamlet's counter-mining will ironically hit his enemy – both Claudius and by extension his supporters -by using the same *kind of method* as Claudius had reserved for him.

While these last two examples are matters for critical argument, I feel that there are also times – though not many – when Edelman is wrong from a scholarly point of view. Thus it is surely misleading to gloss *Hollander* as 'A soldier known for alcohol consumption'. Granted that it was a common belief in Shakespeare's England that the Dutch were heavy drinkers, neither *Hollander* nor *Dutchman*, as words, referred to that fact, or, for that matter, to soldiers. OED makes plain that *Hollander* simply meant 'Dutchman', and it is important to distinguish a usage of this kind from *Switzer*, the plural of which *could*, indeed, refer specifically to military men, i.e. Swiss guards (OED 2).

A more major matter, last but not least, is the question whether the dictionary functions well as a dictionary. In reviewing B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol's *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A Dictionary* – another volume in this series – for *The Review of English Studies* recently I expressed some misgivings about the editorial policy adopted, and I find it necessary to do so again in this instance. The arrangement of the entries strikes me as better in Edelman's book, but there are a number of curious omissions that I would not have expected in a *dictionary* of Shakespeare's military language. Thus I came across *naked* in the sense of 'unarmed' (OED a.4a) only by chance under *man-at-arms*, and I could not find *long sword* (cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.1.75), which is glossed in C. T. Onions's *A Shakespeare Glossary* (rev. Robert D. Eagleson, 1986) and elsewhere as 'old-fashioned, two-handed sword'. Under *buckler* Edelman does discuss 'that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales' (*1 Henry 4*, 1.3.228) but without mentioning, as OED and Onions do, that *sword-and-buckler* could mean 'blustering'.

To indicate that Edelman's book is not perfect is not to say that it is not very good: it certainly makes a significant contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the subject it has chosen to cover.

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Esche, Edward J., *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Performance*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001; cloth; pp. vii, 364; R.R.P. £45.00; ISBN 0745600467.

The 20 essays in this collection come from the Scæna conference held in Cambridge in 1997. By the time of their publication here, seven of them had already appeared in journals—one, Peter Thomson's engaging essay on Tarlton in *this* journal—or, in the case of Janette Dillon's and Wilhelm Hortmann's contributions, as sections of books (in *Theatre, Court and City* and *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century* respectively). Though one is sympathetic to the difficulties faced by editors in getting such volumes into print, one would like to see more of the individual essays appearing for the first time. The essays are grouped in five sections: 'Shakespeare on Film', 'Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Contexts', 'Renaissance Contexts', 'From Text to Performance', and 'Female Roles'. Scæna's distinctive emphasis on performance thus entails a focus on theatre history, plays in their historical contexts, performance as contributing to cultural history, and performance analysed from the perspective of gender politics. Two essays appear in this last category: Diana E. Henderson discusses the absence of Isabel, Queen of France, from Branagh's film of *Henry V* and the implications for the role of Henry, and for the impression of women as agents. Randall Martin analyses cuts in the role of Margaret of Anjou in four recent productions of *Henry VI part III* and makes a persuasive argument that responses to the power wielded by Margaret Thatcher resulted in a simplifying blackening of Shakespeare's Queen. He terms this reduction 'underachieved Shakespeare' (p. 336), a helpful formulation that might well also be deployed in Pamela Mason's account of Benedick in that currently much taught comedy, *Much Ado*. Mason censures conventional speech-prefix emendations in 2. 1, along with the 'usual [theatre] cuts' for promoting a 'soggily romantic' (p. 242) version.